

Tom Horne
Superintendent

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ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUPERINTENDENT TOM HORNE ANNOUNCES NEW GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING ENGLISH IMMERSION INSTRUCTION FOR ARIZONA CHILDREN

PHOENIX (Thursday, February 13, 2003) -- Superintendent Tom Horne today announced new guidelines for school district and charter school superintendents, operator and administrators for the implementation of Arizona English Language Immersion Laws. Superintendent Tom Horne is keeping his campaign promise to ensure that all children learn English as quickly as possible in order that No Child Be Left Behind.

“It is not enough to just enforce the law,” said Superintendent Horne. “This department wants to make sure that every school is serious about teaching students English as quickly as possible, so that they become fluent, and they can then soar academically as individuals.”

Under A.R.S. § 15-756.B, the Department is required to develop guidelines for the monitoring of school districts and charter schools for the purposes of insuring compliance with all federal and state laws regarding English language learners.

The guidelines emphasize, as does A.R.S. § 15-752, that subject to certain exceptions, all children in Arizona public schools shall be taught in English and all children shall be placed in English language classrooms. Children who are English language learners shall be educated through sheltered English immersion.

A key element in the new guidelines is the definition of the exceptions. Under waiver no. 1, the most prominently used waiver, the statute requires that “the child already possesses good English language skills.” This waiver has been abused by school districts qualifying students whose test scores show that they have “limited” English language skills, as defined by the publishers of the tests. The guidelines set forth the scores required to show “good English language skills.” Once good English language skills, demonstrating proficiency in English, are achieved, the Department has no objection to quality dual-language programs, as those students will then be fully functional in English.

The Department does not wish to disrupt any classes occurring this semester. These guidelines anticipate compliance for next semester, beginning August or

September 2003, in order to give time for transition, and to prepare students and programs for compliance with these guidelines.

“It is the new philosophy of this department that its compliance function is secondary, and that its primary function is service to the schools,” said Superintendent Horne. “We want to do everything we can to help the schools do the best possible job academically for the students. To this end, the Department will be sponsoring a seminar this spring on Best Practices for Academically Successful English Immersion, and hopes all relevant schools will participate.”

Supporters of Superintendent Horne guidelines:

Superintendent Stan Paz, Tucson Unified School District states: “Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), school with the largest population of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the state of Arizona, is committed to significant and sustained efforts to improve our students’ performance in English, first and foremost. As students demonstrate proficiency in English, we will support efforts to provide quality dual-language programs for our families requesting this as an option. TUSD is committed to all students requesting this as an option.”

Anna Rosas, Assistant Principal, Wade Carpenter Middle Academy, Nogales states: “The implementation of Proposition 203 has not been a difficult process for our schools in Nogales Unified School District. Our schools had many structured English immersion programs in place for our students to learn English. Many schools also offer Newcomer Programs for those students entering from Mexico or other countries for the first time. Our principals have held meetings to notify our families about the new law. During the 2001-2002 school year only one parent requested a waiver out of approximately 1650 students and there have been no such requested for this school year (2002-2003). Our parents want their children to learn English. They want their children to have the opportunity to achieve academically at the same level as native English speakers. Under the direction of Superintendent Kelt L. Cooper, our school district has implemented a uniform textbook adoption for all our schools. The curriculum and staff development provided have contributed to the success of our students. We look forward to providing more staff development in the area of SEI to better assist our students achievement.”

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